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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the college positions in geography that have become available in the last 8 years and notes their regional distribution. These positions are projected into 1982 and 1983 and compared with the number of individuals qualified to fill them. To measure the number of positions available in geography, the number of new academic positions advertised in the January, February, March, and April issues of the Jobs in Geography (JIG) Section of the Association of American Geographers "AAG Newsletter" from 1974 through 1981 were tabulated. The total number of new positions was compiled for each region of the United States. Conclusions include the following. From 1974 through 1981 the academic job market in geography went through a period of decline. New positions in geography during the period had moved to the Southeast which became the biggest employer of new Ph.D.s. The decline in new positions in geography was paralleled by an even greater decrease in the number of new Ph.D.s graduated. In 1982 there will be a surplus of new positions in excess of Ph.D.s for the first time in many years. The law of supply and demand can be applied to geography positions and this can be interpreted to mean an upcoming surge in graduate school enrollment to fill these surplus jobs. A philosophy change in academia concerning geography will need to happen. College administrators will need to recognize that it is now a seller's market and will have to make adjustments to retain their competent geographers. (RM)

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A LOOK AT ACADEMIC POSITIONS IN GEOGRAPHY, 1974-83

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Geographers Association (San Antonio, TX, April, 1982).

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A LOOK AT ACADEMIC POSITIONS IN GEOGRAPHY, 1974-83 by Jerry Gerlach, Utah State University, Logan, Utah 84322

The early 1970's were a period when Ph.D.s produced outnumbered the positons available in geography. Since the mid 1970's, the number of Ph.D.s produced and jobs in geography have both declined. Jobs in geography have not declined as far as Ph.D.s produced. Further, it appears that a job surplus will occur in 1982. New jobs are most likely to be in the south and west. Last, the profession of geography may see a decline in the quality of new geographers as competition is reduced.

The early 1970s were often referred to as a time when there was a tremendous shortage of new jobs compared to new Ph.D.s.[1] These reports were generally in reference to other disciplines where the production of Ph.D.s was much greater than that of geographers, although there were more geographers graduating than there were positions available.[2] The fact that other disciplines and geography were producing more Ph.D.s than the academic market could absorb undoubtedly influenced academic administrators. A climate came into existence where surplus Ph.D.s were the norm. This climate of the 1970s had a number of positive benefits, which favored the colleges and the profession of geography. However, because of the surplus individual Ph.D.s were hindered.

It would seem only rational that a Ph.D. surplus situation could not last forever and clear thinking individuals would not enter a field where there were very good possibilities they would not be able to find positions. The peak year in the U.S. for Ph.D. production was 1974 and the number declined every year thereafter.[3] The decline in the number of Ph.D.s produced was surely related to the decline in new positions. It could be argued that the academic world is a model of the economic market place theory of supply and demand. As long as demand is exceeded by supply a situation will be created whereby supply (Ph.D.s produced) will decline until a balance between the two exists. Unfortunately, the academic world is not finely tuned and extremes between under and over supply of Ph.D.s have been, and seem likely to be, the rule as opposed to one of balance. If this rule holds then it would appear we will be entering an era in the 1980s

when positions in geography will exceed the number of qualified individuals to fill them. This situation will again alter the view of academic administrators and create another new climate. This situation will probably occur but in a manner that is analagous to other population fluctuations in the U.S. which means uneven distribution.

The purpose of this paper is to look at college positions that have become available in the last eight years and to note their regional distribution. Further, these positions will be projected into 1982 and 1983 and compared with the individuals qualified to fill them.

METHOD

To measure the number of positions available in geography the number of new listings published in the January, February, March, and April issues of J.I.G. for each year inclusive of 1974 through 1981 were tabulated. These issues were used as a sample for the year. However, it should be noted that this one-third of the year includes the vast majority of new positions listed for each year. Since academic positions are usually advertised from January to June and filled by the latter, it was felt a rather accurate picture of the job market would be obtained by viewing these prime months.

The next step was to compile the total number of new positions for each region in the U.S. by year and then to construct a map of the total number of new positions by region. The regions were: New England, Middle Atlantic States including D.C., the Southeast, the Midwest, the North Central States, the Southwest, the Rocky Mountain States, and the Pacific Coast including Alaska and Hawaii.

A graph was constructed to illustrate the growth or decline in positions for each region from 1974 through 1981.

The final step was to graph and compare the number of new positions in geography with the number of new Ph.D.s available. The data in the graph came from the latest data available for both new positions and Ph.D.s granted. However, the data for Ph.D.s granted is accurate only through 1979 while for positions it is through 1981. Therefore, projections were made for Ph.D.s granted from 1980 through 1983 while job projections are only for 1982 and 1983. Since projections are at best guesses, high and low ones were formulated for each year to give a range of possible numbers. The graph lists surplus of Ph.D.s over positions for each year.

RESULTS

The total number of new positions in geography during the 1974-81 period was 771 (Fig. 1). The major regions for employment of geographers were the Southeast (19%) and the Midwest (18%). The Middle Atlantic (15%) and Pacific Coast (19%) regions were also important as sources of new positions. These four regions were the source of 65% of the new positions available for geographers. An important observation is geography positions moved south during the 1970s just as the general population did.

The new positions are listed on a yearly basis (Table 1). The peak year for new positions was in 1974, which also was coincidental with the apex of the Ph.D.s produced curve.[4] The number of new positions available has declined from this year until the low was reached in 1981 with 71. The regional positions are listed and the general trend has been one of decline for all areas. If one assumes that there were also some retirements, then the conclusion that there was a loss of positions in geography during this time period is justifiable.

The number of new positions and the Ph.D.s earned are compared (Table 20. On the national level both new positions and new Ph.D.s have witnessed a

steady decline since 1974. The decline in the number of new Ph.D.s, however, has been greater than the decline in the number of new positions in geography. The significance of this decline is viewed with special interest for by 1982 there is a strong possibility there will be no shortage of positions for new Ph.D.s. In fact, if the current trend continues the early 1980s should be a period when geography positions will exceed the number of new qualified individuals to fill them. The projection for positions and Ph.D.s was only carried two years beyond 1981 because it was felt institutions would attempt to correct the imbalance by either eliminating positions or increasing the output of Ph.D.s.

TABLE 1

NEW POSITIONS IN GEOGRAPHY, 1974-1981

Region	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	Total
New England	6	2	8	3	8	4	0	4	25
Middle Atlantic	24	4	19	18	17	16	14	6	118
Southeast	25	15	15	18	20	20	20	13	146
Middle West	19	7	14	22	23	12	25	18	140
North Central	8	8	6	6	6	10	4	5	53
Southwest	10	7	8	6	10	7	3	9	60
Rocky Mountain	4	6	3	4	0	2	0	4	25
Pacific Coast	13	23	13	9	12	6	6	12	94
U.S.	109	72	86	86	96	77	72	71	771

Source: Calculated from the AAG Newsletter, Vols. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 14, and 16, Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4.

TABLE 2

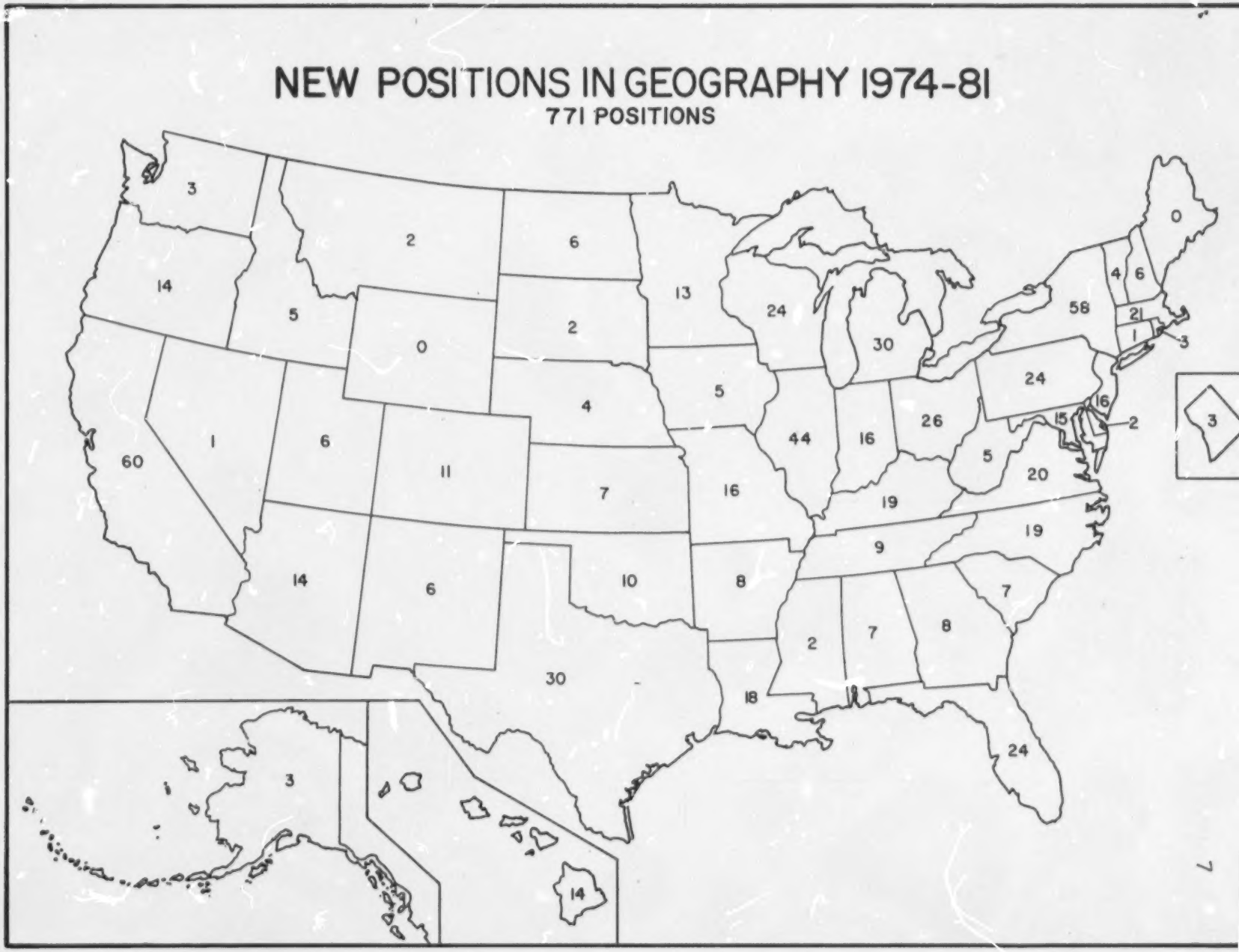
Ph.D.s EARNED AND NEW POSITIONS LISTED

	Ph.D.s Granted	New Positions Listed	Surplus of Ph.D.s Over Positions
1974	182	109	73
1975	177	72	105
1976	139	86	53
1977	128	86	42
1978	127	96	31
1979	106	77	29
1980	91[1] 96[2]	72	19[1] 24[2]
1981	76[1] 86[2]	71	5[1] 15[2]
1982	61[1] 76[2]	62[1] 70[2]	-1[1] 6[2]
1983	45[1] 66[2]	53[1] 67[2]	-8[1]-1[2]

[1]Low Projection

[2]High Projection

Source: Calculated from the AAG Newsletter Vols. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16, Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4. Ph.D.s granted from AAG Newsletter, Vol. 16, No. 2 p. 2.


NEW POSITIONS IN GEOGRAPHY 1974-81
771 POSITIONS
3
14
5
2
0
6
2
13
24
30
58
4
6
21
1
3
0
24
16
15
2
3
5
4
60
1
6
11
7
16
44
16
26
5
20
19
9
19
14
6
10
8
2
7
8
7
30
18
24
3
14

CONCLUSIONS

From 1974 through 1981 the academic job market in geography went through a period highlighted by decline. New positions in geography during the period had moved to the Southeast which became the biggest employer of new Ph.D.s. It would not be unwise to speculate that an increasing share of the new positions will also go Southeast, Southwest, and West. The loss of new positions will probably come from the Midwest and the Northeast.

The decline in new positions in geography was paralleled by an even greater decrease in the number of new Ph.D.s graduated. The decrease in Ph.D.s granted was of significant enough size to reduce the job deficit to a point where 1982 should witness a surplus of new positions in excess of Ph.D.s for the first time in many years. The law of supply and demand can be applied to geography positions and this can be interpreted to mean an upcoming surge in graduate school enrollment to fill the surplus jobs that will probably exist in the early 1980s.

These changes in the relationship of positions and Ph.D.s will spawn several new things. A philosophy change in academia concerning geography will need to happen. Administrators will need to recognize that it is now a seller's market and will have to make adjustments to retain their competent geographers. The employment picture of the early 1980s will favor the individual geographer at the expense of the college and the professions, which was not the case in the 1970s. A lessening of competition for positions may erode the quality of geography research and teaching.

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[2]Ibid.

[3]Gerlach, Jerry D. "The Origins of Professional Geographers in the United States 1972-77," The Professional Geographer, 31 (1979), -. 216.

[4]Ibid.